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Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Corrections

Assembly Bill 149

Thank you, Chairman Bies and members, for the opportunity to speak today in favor of Assembly Bill 149.

False 911 calls—calls made by a caller to report an emergency situation that he or she knows does not exist—can be a significant public safety hazard. They waste the time of law enforcement, firefighters, and other emergency personnel. These calls not only consume resources that should be reserved for legitimate emergencies, but they potentially endanger lives by forcing police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances to race through the streets for no reason. They can also cause buildings to be evacuated and streets to be cut off, further increasing unnecessary costs to society.

False 911 calls are illegal in Wisconsin, but a first offender may be fined only between \$50 and \$300. The \$300 maximum was established in 1987, while the \$50 minimum has been in place since 1978, longer than one member of this committee has been alive. (First offenders may also be imprisoned for up to 90 days, and people who reoffend within four years are guilty of a Class H felony.)

AB 149 doubles the current minimum and maximum limits, so that a judge may impose a fine of \$100 to \$600. Doubling the fine approximates inflation since 1987, when the Legislature increased the maximum from \$200 to \$300. At that time, the Legislature apparently believed that \$50 was still a sufficiently high minimum, which is why I used 1987 as the base for that figure, too.

I think it makes sense to revisit criminal fines every now and then, to make sure that years—or decades—of inflation do not diminish their effectiveness as deterrents and punishments, and I hope the committee will hold an executive session on AB 149 in the near future.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Assembly Bill 149.

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Ex-Firefighter Accused Of Making Fake 911 Calls

Bentivegna Made Initial Court Appearance Tuesday

Updated: 8:02 pm CDT October 5, 2010



JANESVILLE, Wis. -- A former volunteer firefighter with the Footville Fire Department is accused of making false 911 calls.

Dustin Bentivegna, 24, made his initial appearance Tuesday in Rock County Circuit Court.

Authorities said Bentivegna admitted to making four 911 calls.

Authorities said the caller three times reported smelling a natural gas odor and once reported a problem with arcing wires. The Fire Department responded and said each call was unfounded.

Bentivegna appeared in court Tuesday without a lawyer, so the judge granted him a continuance to find one.

Ex-Firefighter Accused Of Making Fake 911 Calls



Bentivegna's apparent motive was to build camaraderie with other firefighters, according to investigators. The criminal complaint said Bentivegna made the calls so he could put on his uniform, ride in the truck and investigate with the other firefighters.

If convicted of the four misdemeanor charges, Bentivegna faces nearly a year in jail and a \$1,200 fine.

He is scheduled to be back in court later this month.

Court records show Bentivegna was convicted Aug. 10 on a misdemeanor charge of impersonating a peace officer. He pleaded no contest and paid a \$488 fine in connection to an incident on May 5.

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fox6now.com/news/witi-111810-hostage-situation,0,4468020.story

WITI

Fake 911 call forced lockdown of Boelter company in Glendale

Police figured out the 911 call was fake two hours after being called to the scene

8:44 PM CST, November 18, 2010

WITI-TV, GLENDALE

Glendale Police say someone called in a fake armed robbery at Boelter Company. Officers locked down a large portion of Port Washington Rd. between Capitol Dr. and Hampton Ave.

Glendale and Milwaukee police armed with rifles lock down Port Washington Rd. at 5:30 p.m. Their sweep centered around Boelter. Company President Eric Boelter got the call after leaving work for the day.

Boelter watched as police searched for a possible suspect with 50-60 of his employees inside. By 7:15 p.m. it looks like the search is based on bad information. Boelter says, "The bogus 911 takes time away from police and the Boelter employees."

The shut down of Port Washington Rd. lasted about two hours. Police on the scene wouldn't say where the 911 call came from.

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Woman makes false 911 call reporting shooting to divert officers, police say

BILL NOVAK | The Capital Times | bnovak@madison.com | Posted: Wednesday, December 1, 2010 11:50 am

A Madison woman is in serious legal trouble after making a false 911 call apparently intended to draw police away from her location, after she had been cited for shoplifting and told by police not to drive because she was drunk and had a suspended license, Madison police reported.

Tierra Miles, 27, was tentatively charged with reporting a false emergency through a telephone (911) following her arrest Tuesday night on Magnolia Lane, Madison police said.

The bizarre chain of events started when the 911 communications center got a call from a cell phone in which the caller said she had just witnessed a shooting on Lake Point Drive.

"She said she was driving when she saw the gunfire around 6:20 p.m.," said police spokesman Joel DeSpain. "She said a man had been shot, she saw him fall to the ground, and he was having difficulty breathing. Then the call was disconnected."

The 911 center took no chances in sending police to the scene.

Officers, sergeants, lieutenants and even Capt. Joe Balles from the south district station responded to the scene, as a perimeter was set up in the 2000 block of Lake Point Drive.

"Officers set out on foot to find the victim, suspects, witnesses or even just the scene of the crime," DeSpain said.

Other officers went to area hospitals, just in case the wounded man turned up.

The 911 center couldn't get the caller back on the line, but the number eventually was traced to Miles.

That info rang a bell at the Monona Police Department.

"15 minutes before the 911 call about the shooting came in, Miles had been cited for shoplifting at South Towne Mall in Monona," DeSpain said. "Police said she was intoxicated and had a suspended driver's license, so they wouldn't let her drive her van from the mall parking lot."

The false 911 call pulled basically all the officers on the south side to Lake Point Drive.

"Monona police theorized she wanted to divert police elsewhere so she could get her van," DeSpain said.

Once this was known, the perimeter on Lake Point Drive was disbanded, and officers directed their attention to finding Miles.

She and the van were found on the street where she lives.

"She stuck to the story about a man being shot," DeSpain said. "She also said she didn't call 911 again because her cell phone died."

Why didn't she call 911 when she got home?

"She said she saw all the squad cars on the Beltline heading toward Lake Point Drive, so she just assumed police were already where they needed to be," DeSpain said.

